



**Town of Arlington, Massachusetts**  
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## **Historic Districts Commission Minutes 03/23/06**

### **ARLINGTON HISTORIC DISTRICTS COMMISSION** **Whittemore-Robbins House** **Final Minutes 3-23-06**

Commissioners Present: S. Makowka, A. Frisch, A. Alberg, Y. Logan,  
 B. Cohen arrived at 8:25pm, J. Worden arrived 9:20pm

Commissioners

Not Present: M. Logan, M. Penzenik, M. Potter,

Guests Present: Susan & Nick Svencer, Gina Yarborough, Jeff Salocks, David Dolan, Marc Sachs, David Whitney,  
 Chris Wright

- 1 Meeting Opens 8:05pm**
- 2 Appointment of alternate Commissioners to Mt Gilboa/Crescent Hill Districts – A. Frisch, S. Makowka**
- 3 Approval of minutes of January 26 and February 23, 2006 moved to table until next hearing by S. Makowka, seconded by a. Alberg, unanimous**
- 4 Communications**
  - a. E-mails & Phone Calls re: 16 Maple Street to S. Makowka & C. Greeley
  - b. E-mails & Phone Calls re: 197 Lowell Street
  - c. E-mails & Phone Calls re: 157 Lowell Street
  - d. E-mails & Phone Calls re: 26 Academy Street
  - e. Phone Call from 45 Jason Street re: porch renovations
  - f. E-mail re: Russell St. (Lagow) re: satellite dish installed on house
  - g. Fax requesting minutes of 4/05, 5/05, and 6/05 and 10/27/05 Letter from L. Warnock to Commissioners from Leann Kennedy D'Entremont, Tewksbury, MA
- 5 New Business**
  - a Formal hearing re: 42 Academy Street (Sacks) re: renovations and addition to existing house 8:20pm**  
 Marc Sachs, owner of property, appeared with architect David Whitney. They explained that the house is much younger than others in the district. The house is an infill ranch house constructed in 1969. They described it as a non-historical house in historic district. In thinking about adding space to the house, the direction they have chosen is to expand house and not to try and masquerade as historic house in district. Last summer, they came before the Arlington Historical Commission to get ideas for possible changes. They are now proposing a design with three fundamental changes – add space on new floor above part of the house, expand closer to street w/ mostly glazed entry foyer (a little more formal) and, revise exterior elevations to a more “interesting style” appropriate for the period in which it was built. In some ways the existing house is trying to be colonial revival, which it is not, so the proposed changes to window & siding material are an attempt to create stronger example of 1960’s-type contemporary architecture than it is now. The applicant presented plans and elevations of existing and proposed structure as well as photographs looking up street and drawings of plans showing potential new view. In addition, they offered pictures of other houses of the Modern era. The applicant also suggested that the changes would be more in keeping with neighborhood on overall scale and formality. S. Makowka asked for a plot plan showing the location of the existing and proposed building on the site. The applicant explained that the front façade was currently in line with other buildings and proposed foyer addition would be an interpretation of other similar structures on Academy Street.

S. Makowka said his initial reaction was that this was not a significant contributing structure and that protecting this particular structure was not the reason the district was established, however, he does not think that the argument that modification to any style house from a particular period is appropriate is the best argument here. For example, it might not be appropriate to alter an 1880's Queen Anne to create an 1880's-type house in another style.

M. Sachs said that he supported the effort on his street to form a historic district to preserve the area even though there is more than one non-contributing house on the street. S. Makowka explained that the Commission was responsible for trying to preserve things as much as possible and needed to be sure that any changes made to any property were not incongruous with being in a district. S. Makowka explained that, from his perspective, there were a couple of issues to discuss: this is a dramatic change in style and it is a change in size of the structure which affects the spacing, rhythm, massing, of the street. The applicants architect said with regard to massing, the challenge is to add space onto house gracefully, and also, part of change in exterior style has to do with that – to add on in existing language of house would be ungainly.

B. Cohen related that when she was first a member of the AHC (not AHDC), a property came up for demolition that was built in the 1960s Modern style by someone at the Gropius studio. She did research on property to make a decision about whether to demolish or not since there were very few 1960s Modern houses in Arlington. Here she was debating about this more contemporary house was historic when she talked to the original architect who point blank said that wasn't his best work and it's OK if it gets knocked down. That house wasn't too far off from looking like proposed new house. In the end the property demolished and replaced with 6 infill houses. Getting back to this one, it would certainly be unique on street, but something to be said for having something that's so architectural as opposed to what you currently have – a very standard house. Academy street has a number of houses from 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries – yes, certainly different in styling from street, but there are currently multiple styles. B. Cohen also said that in looking at the plans, the massing has to be played with a bit to be appropriate.

M. Sachs asked the Commission to remember that he has lived here since 1991, that he wants to stay here, that he has knocked on neighbors' doors and the reaction of one was "cool". The problem he has to solve is adding more space, and he wants to solve it while being in context with neighbors, the street and the town and is here looking for guidance & assistance. From his perspective, there are special houses on street that come from a number of different eras, many of which are gorgeous houses, however, his existing house is not gorgeous. An attempt to expand the existing house while sticking to the current vocabulary would take something mediocre and simply make it bigger. Here they want to make something special. B. Cohen agreed.

A. Frisch said he had nothing vested in maintaining house as is, however, he likes changes when there is a connection to place – New England, Boston, etc. He finds the a house out of context is jarring and occasionally runs across a house that looks like it belongs in Florida or Arizona, but we're not either of those places. He suggested that the mass was not a problem, but wondered if the design was too international rather than New England. A. Alberg was comfortable with the massing, but of interest to her is the fabric of what you would be using – stucco, uncomfortable, but massing no problem, and this is not a contributing house. In short, she would consider this plan an improvement. B. Cohen felt the massing needs improvement to work better on left side. Regarding the projecting entries, although different in form and a different language from the other example shown, it does go with the proposed architectural style. S. Makowka summarized that it would be helpful to consider different alternatives on left front massing which appears too much like a giant box. A. Frisch likes right side of design but agrees that left side needs to be further developed. Also this style is very much concerned with using contemporary building materials, so need to look at that in keeping with style and let form follow function while doing something with roof on left. S. Makowka said that he would like to understand the relative massing of proposed house relative to surrounding structures. The perspective presented gives the impression that the roofline is lower than house on left in one view but not in another. He would like to see another elevation of the proposed house and neighboring structures. A straightforward drawing with some elevation with peaks accurately represented, showing spacing in houses without a lot of details (block massing) would be fine.

M. Sachs summarized that he wants assistance, and appreciates criticisms as well as comments. Hearing continued until next month.

**b Informal hearing re: 157 Lowell Street (Nyberg) re: porch railings.** Applicant is currently replacing porch and deck, which were in very bad disrepair, under a CONA. He is restoring exactly as was there originally, using original spindles as well as about 50 new matching ones to replace deteriorated ones. He is before the Commission tonight to discuss the handrails on the stairs. The existing conditions are gas pipes used as handrails but porch posts show shadow of original wooden railings. He would like to rebuild a wooden structure using same spindles as on porch railings. S. Makowka said he is not opposed, but did not feel that a CONA was appropriate since this was not a repair or restoration of existing conditions. B. Cohen suggested that this would be appropriate and that the spindle pattern on the railing should match the spindle pattern (style and spacing) in the porch above. S. Makowka suggested that since this a relatively minor alteration that

represents a move back toward original conditions, a 10-day certificate might be appropriate. A. Alberg moved that since the effect of the change will be insubstantial to the building and the district, it is determined that a public hearing can be dispensed with, a certificate issued after abutters have been notified and a ten day period for comments has passed, seconded by Y. Logan with no comments. Voted unanimously in favor. A. Alberg moved that the Mt. Gilboa/Crescent Hill Historic District Commission, having fully reviewed the application before it, finds that the project under consideration as presented with the spindles from the porch replicated and spacing to match the existing front porch will be in harmony and not incongruous with the historical and architectural values of the district. Seconded for discussion purposes by S. Makowka who suggested a modification giving the monitor final approval of design prior to installation. A. Alberg accepted modification which was seconded by A. Frisch – no discussion. Voted unanimously in favor. Monitor will be S. Makowka.

**c Informal hearing re: 197 Lowell Street (Svencer) re: gutter repair & replacement.** S. Makowka summarized his understanding of the items before the Commission and noted that this was an informal hearing since the application was received after the formal notice deadline. The applicant would most likely be back before the Commission next month for a formal hearing. He added that the house is visible from Elder Terrace. The existing downspouts are aluminum which would be replaced with aluminum, like with like, so okay for a CONA. The proposed removal of the deteriorated metal and construction of a new shed is under the Commission's jurisdiction. S. Makowka said no problem with the demolition of the metal shed structure so long as the concrete slab is removed as well. The applicant said that they hoped to dig it up and make that area usable space, but where not that far yet in their planning yet. Also, the applicant described that they are looking to rebuild a smaller wooden shed on back corner of property, which would be about the same height as the existing fence at that location. An abutter to the property said he'd love to see the metal shed gone and had no problems with the proposed wooden shed.

Next, the applicant discussed changes to the gutters and fascia. The wooden gutters are falling apart with the ends rotting out and the eaves are also rotting out in many places. Also, they feel that the volume of the gutters is not sufficient for the size of house since the wooden gutters don't have capacity to get water off the house.

The applicant proposed to replace the wood gutter with a half-round gutter that would look like a painted copper gutter. They also suggested that this would look more appropriate here rather than the k style gutter.

S. Makowka said wood gutters do come in greater width to carry more water but probably wouldn't fit into profile of house and could look funny. B. Cohen had no objection of putting in copper style gutter. A. Frisch agreed. S. Makowka asked for an example of PVC gutter alternative found by the applicant. The applicant said that this was an option, but was much more expensive than wood. S. Makowka's only question about aluminum gutters is the precedent set if we accept this style as replacement for wood gutter. B. Cohen said the wood gutters on the house are clearly undersized and having a copper profile is not inconsistent with period – A. Alberg feels painted aluminum in a copper profile has a historical profile to it and even if there aren't any in neighborhood, the fact that they will be painted to match the rest of the trim, works for her. S. Makowka asked about the proposed bracket system. The applicant stated that it would be very basic, just a clip and nail that runs through. S. Makowka explained that some styles of gutters have very prominent seams where a separate corner piece is used. In these situations, the Commission has required that a mitered corner be used instead. A Commissioner asked if they are replacing downspouts anyway, can they go to a rounded and fluted profile. S. Makowka said that the Commission could not require this change but that this change would certainly add to the character of the house. S. Makowka recommended formal hearing for next month.

J. Worden arrived at 9:20pm

**d Informal hearing re: 16 Maple Street (Rogers) re: renovations**

S. Makowka explained that he had talked with the soon to be homeowners, and while they did not have a formal proposal before us, he had suggested they attend an informal hearing to get preliminary feedback from the Commission about possible future changes. B. Cohen commented that that this was a very historic property, owned by the founder & president of The Arlington Historical Society (George Wellington). Ginnie Yarborough and Ken Rogers (the soon to be owners) explained that they know the history of the house which was originally the Joseph Potter cottage (one of people responsible for re-naming Arlington from west Cambridge) and was most recently later owned by Morton Bradley for many years. The will be taking ownership of the house very soon and have applied to be one of the "This Old House" houses and are in top 4 finalists. They hope to bring house back and are here to be educated on the Commission's process. K. Rogers said porch used to wrap around, but has disappeared on driveway side. Their first hope to restore that porch since the missing porch looks obvious. For last 30/40 years, the house has been used as a two-family home and has been partitioned inside in a relatively sympathetic way. However, on the outside driveway side, there is a muddled half shack at the side entrance and a later flat roofed sunroom was added at the back. They need to fix that side of the house and will probably want to do something on outside of the sunroom to make it fit or eliminate it entirely. By the way, the sunroom is next to 25 foot wide base of the oldest oak in town. The first order of business will be to deal with paint in disrepair, but they understand that that is not under Commission jurisdiction. S. Makowka explained that for restoration work, replacing gutters, etc. an application for a CONA is recommended so that there is documentation of what they are proposing to do.

**e Informal hearing re: 26 Academy Street (Wright) re: 2<sup>nd</sup> floor window renovations.** Chris Wright presented that he is mechanically restoring, preserve and painting 14 historical windows. Sashes will be removed from their frames for 4 weeks and then returned to their original window frames. This would qualify for CONA. However, as part of this process he determined that three windows on a rear second floor bump out were a-symmetrical and non-original, poor quality windows. He is proposing to replace these three windows with units that match other replacement units approved by the Commission for this site. S. Makowka, who visited the site, summarized that the three windows were on the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor of bump out: 1 not visible, 1 obliquely visible, 1 slightly visible between buildings on Maple Street. The muntins don't match, they are different sizes, and are not part of original fabric of the house. Nice aesthetic, quickly became obvious that need to replace – A. Frisch asked to remind him of what windows just approved were – S. Makowka said specify windows to be ones that have been just approved – resizing of one (Maple St exposure) to make it symmetrical. S. Makowka said we need to say “to match previously approved windows” – A. Alberg moved that the Pleasant Street Historic District Commission, having fully reviewed the application before it, finds that the project under consideration, if constructed according to the plans submitted therewith, will be in harmony and not incongruous with the historical and architectural values of the district. Since the effect of the change will be insubstantial to the building and the district, it is determined that a public hearing can be dispensed with, and a certificate issued after abutters have been notified and a ten day period for comments has passed. Seconded by J. Worden, approved unanimously. Motion to approve windows as presented made by J. Worden, seconded by B. Cohen, approved unanimously.

## **6 Other Business**

a Oak Knoll Expansion – Selectmen voted to support. S. Makowka needs recommendation from Redev. Board – communication problem and they will be hearing it and probably supporting it, but hearing coming up on April 3 to discuss expansion. S. Makowka looking for someone willing to go over to answer any questions that may come up.

b Heritage Landscape Inventory – meeting March 29 at Central School 7pm S. Makowka hoped at least one commissioner can attend – Carol will send e-mail around to remind everyone and to get at least one commitment

c Satellite dishes – bylaws restrict our jurisdiction from antennae and a bit of gray area re: satellite dishes whether they fall under that exclusion – question whether our design guidelines should be requiring discreet placement, not in prominent locations – A. Frisch felt discreetly would not be issue, but street frontage not aesthetically pleasing – A. Alberg said she doesn't feel we can say something about it – question about the legal opinion – S. Makowka said we should maybe send a request to Town Counsel for a legal interpretation

d S. Makowka received formal resignation from D. Santos because she moved out of Arlington. A. Frisch nominated and Selectmen approved to Arlington Preservation Fund. Two seats on Commissions available now – Mt Gilboa/Crescent Hill and Broadway

e B. Cohen asked Commissioners if they had a problem with her granting a slight change in the side dormer on the 147 Lowell Street property without a revision of the entire certificate. Upon review of proposed changes, the Commissioners agreed that it was such a minor thing that she could approve as monitor. J. Salocks, a neighbor, also agreed that he had no issue with the monitor making that particular call herself.

**10:00pm meeting adjourned**

Respectfully submitted,

Carol Greeley  
Executive Secretary, AHDC